



City of Reading Mayor's Neighborhood Matching Grants Program Guidelines 2008

Purpose:

The Mayor's Neighborhood Matching Grants (MNMG) program provides funding to assist neighborhoods in undertaking projects to improve the quality of life in their communities. The MNMG program is designed to provide Reading's neighborhood organizations with grants of \$500 to \$2,500 to implement projects that address neighborhood needs and improve the quality of life in Reading's neighborhoods.

Eligible Organizations:

Neighborhood or resident organizations, whose primary purpose is neighborhood enhancement and development, may apply for a Mayor's Neighborhood Matching Grant (MNMG). If the organization is not a member of the Reading Council of Neighborhoods (CON) it must partner with a member for funding of the project.

To qualify, non-CON organizations must:

1. be located in the City of Reading;
2. have a majority of the organization's members living or operating a businesses in the neighborhood;
3. not discriminate and actively seek membership from City of Reading residents;
4. represent Reading citizens and have democratically elected officers;
5. partner with a neighborhood organization of the Reading Council of Neighborhoods
6. have been organized for at least six months before applying for a grant.

Entities not eligible are individuals, businesses, citywide/countywide organizations, social service agencies, fraternal and religious organizations, colleges and universities, political groups and public agencies. However, ineligible organizations are encouraged to form partnerships with CON organizations to undertake projects.

The CON neighborhood organization must be the lead applicant. However, project planning, budgeting, execution, and administration can be undertaken by either group.

Eligible Projects:

In order to be eligible, proposed neighborhood projects must:

1. take place within the boundaries of the neighborhood, except when donated space is located outside the neighborhood or is done in partnership with another neighborhood organization
2. provide a public benefit to the neighborhood;
3. have an accountable neighborhood resident/business owner/key individual serve as the project leader;

4. involve neighborhood residents in all phases;
5. be on public property or private property that is accessible to the public;
6. have goals which can be accomplished in twelve (12) months or less;
7. not use grant funds to supplant the organization's operating budget or a City of Reading program;
8. have means of sustainability identified

Project Categories:

The three major project categories, with examples of possible projects, are:

1. **Educational or Cultural Initiatives:** Cultural and diversity enhancing programs, festivals, neighborhood flea markets, special athletic or recreational activities for youth, family development activities, good neighbor/ good citizen training, new neighbor and "Welcome Wagon" programs, neighborhood contests such as best porch, backyard, house, etc.
2. **Public Safety:** Neighborhood parent patrols, family safety training, senior citizen home safety programs, drug awareness and fire prevention programs, supplemental residential lighting, etc.
3. **Physical Improvements:** Tot lots, playground and minor park improvements, benches, neighborhood entrance beautification, flower gardens, planter boxes, tree trimming, graffiti removal, "eyesore" rehabilitation, house numbering, etc.

Grant Award Recipients Must:

1. meet all requirements for eligible organizations
2. meet all requirements for eligible projects.
3. address a need that benefits the neighborhood.
4. have an accountable individual to serve as the project leader
5. have approval of the eligible organization:
 - a. approving the proposal before submitting the grant application to the City, and;
 - b. approving a project leader that will be authorized to make decisions and approve spending on the project.
6. submit with the grant application a copy of the organization's meeting minutes reflecting the membership vote to approve the grant application and the project leader to approve spending.
7. involve neighborhood residents directly in all phases of the project.
8. provide a copy of 501(c)(3) status and a letter of understanding from a local accounting firm reflecting the fact that the neighborhood organization's accounting system is reviewed annually if the organization chooses to be directly funded for the project.
9. be able to complete the project with only technical assistance provided by of the City of Reading.
10. submit project status reports and digital photographs to Office of Neighborhood Development.
11. submit a "Completed Project" report within sixty days of project completion.
12. allow the City of Reading to share and promote the success of the project as a part of promoting its efforts to develop neighborhoods in the City.

Grant Amount/Neighborhood Match

The City of Reading awards Mayor's Neighborhood Matching Grants of \$500 to a maximum of \$2,500. Organizations applying for grants must provide a match in volunteer labor and donations equal to 50% of the MNMG (25% volunteer labor and 25% for in-kind/cash donations) for the funds requested from the City. Matching funds must be applied against specific, individual projects. Projects cannot be combined. The neighborhood match must be generated as follows:

Volunteer hours from the neighborhood are mandatory - Volunteer hours are valued at \$10 an hour for the purpose of calculating the match. **A minimum of 25%** of the matching grant amount must be volunteer hours from neighbors who reside in the defined neighborhood. Only volunteer hours accrued after the project has been approved can be used as part of the match. Volunteer hours will be tracked and maintained by the project leader and reported as a part of the status report. Volunteers' time commitments are to be predetermined and are submitted with the application.

In-Kind Donations - includes supplies, equipment, space, labor or professional services (but not volunteer labor). In-kind donations must be predetermined and reflected in the budget. The value of labor and professional services is based upon the reasonable and customary, fair market value of the services rendered. All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the IRS (provided through the RBI/OND 501 (c)(3) status). In order to be counted as match, all contributions must be relevant and support the implementation of the project.

Cash donations - All cash donations must be predetermined and reflected in the budget. All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the IRS (provided through the RBI/OND 501 (c)(3) status) if checks or cash are submitted to RBI/OND).

In-kind and cash donations for the project must be obtained by the neighborhood organization in order to receive a MNMG. NOs submitting grant applications will be required to match, through a combination of in-kind donations and cash donations, **a minimum of 25%** of the requested MNMG amount (not the total project amount).

For example, if a NO intends to undertake a neighborhood project that will require \$3,750 of total resources and the NO submits a proposal for \$2,500 from the MNMG, the NO will have to get commitments for volunteer labor of \$625 (25% of \$2,500) and some combination of in-kind and cash donations equaling \$625 (25% of \$2,500) to meet the MNMG matching requirement.

Grant Budget

A complete budget must be submitted. An example is provided. The method of presentation is optional, but use of an Excel spreadsheet is preferred. All cash and in-kind donations must be identified. All expenses must be outlined. Organizations may budget up to a total of \$250 for a kick off and/or celebration event. The \$250 is the maximum combined total that may be used for any kick off or celebrations associated with the grant project (unless the project is itself a celebration). Any equipment purchased through the MNMG program (that is not permanently attached) must be stored in a public location (such as the RBI/OND office). Grant funds are not to be used to purchase appreciation gifts or certificates for City staff or elected officials.

Physical Improvement Project Guidelines

In the City of Reading a building permit is required for any man-made structure being built or installed whether on private property or in the City right-of-way. Examples of a structure would be neighborhood signs, fences, walls, fountains, gazebos, and sheds.

MNMG projects must be conducted in accordance with all applicable federal, state and local laws. If the grant is awarded, organizations having projects involving public property must receive the written permission of the appropriate governmental jurisdiction, i.e. Pennsylvania Dept. of Transportation, City of Reading Transportation Engineering, City of Reading Planning and Zoning Department, City of Reading Parks and Recreation Department, etc. The grant recipient must obtain all permits required for the project. Virtually any structure being installed or constructed will require a permit. Funds from MNMG fund will not be released until permits have been issued.

Physical improvement projects may only be installed or constructed on public property or property used by, or accessed by, the public. Physical improvements by neighborhood organizations to existing neighborhood facilities are acceptable. Repair or upgrading is also permissible.

Physical improvements may not be made to or installed on private property unless said improvements are available for public use and enjoyment by citizens. If the public has the legal right to enter upon the private property to access the physical improvements(which it must have), then the applicant must have written permission from the property owner to allow such and it must be included in the MNMG application. (For questions regarding projects that may include a physical improvement on private property contact the Office of Neighborhood Development at 610-655-6277 to determine whether the proposed improvement meets the above-described criteria.) The private property criteria must be met prior to submitting your application. (Grant applications will not be considered and will be returned if the organization fails to meet these requirements for improvements to private property.)

If constructing or installing a neighborhood identification sign or entranceway feature on City right-of-way, the organization must comply with the City sign policy. At the time of application submission, however, project proposals will only require a preliminary plan that includes the simple measurements, location, etc. Details regarding signage plans can be obtained through the City of Reading Planning/Zoning Department

When constructing or installing a sign, wall, fence, gazebo, playground equipment, irrigation or other physical features, exact site location, with measurements of the proposed physical improvement project and site, must be submitted with the application.

If a grant is awarded that requires a permit, a site plan will likely be required. The site plan must provide detailed information about what is being constructed. (Details regarding site plans can be obtained through the City of Reading Planning/Zoning Department.) At the time of application submission, however, project proposals will only require a preliminary site plan that includes the simple measurements, location, etc. Funds for the project, however, will not be released until permits are awarded.

The organization is fully responsible for the maintenance of any physical improvement funded by this grant and is required to provide a long-term plan on how the organization will fund and maintain the physical improvement.

Project Team

The organization must create a project team consisting of a project leader and several members. The purpose of the team is to plan, manage and ensure the project's completion. At a minimum the project team must include a member of the NO leadership team and a project leader. Project team members must live (or own a business) in the neighborhood in which the project occurs.

The project leader, who serves as the chairman of the team, will be the primary contact with RBI/OND. The project leader is responsible for meeting all terms of the MNMG agreement, including submitting project reports and a final report. The NO leadership team member will act as the liaison between the project team and the NO. The project team should recruit other neighbors to participate in the implementation of the grant project.

All questions regarding the MNMG Program should be directed to RBI/OND. In addition, all reports should be submitted to RBI/OND.

Application Deadline

Submit the completed MNMG application (along with two copies) with all applicable attachments to the City of Reading Office of the Mayor, 815 Washington Street, Reading, PA 19601 (second floor of City Hall). Incomplete applications will not be considered and will be returned to the organization.

The MNMG program will accept grant proposals at any time. However, grants will be reviewed and awarded on a quarterly basis. Application review begins after the end of each quarter of the year, beginning with March 31, following with June 30, September 30, and December 31.

Project Selection

Each project will be evaluated on the basis of how well it demonstrates the MNMG program's main purpose of improving neighborhoods by addressing a specific need or concern. Generally, projects are not funded for more than one year. For those projects that require multiple year funding, other funding sources should be sought for those additional years. Neighborhood organizations may submit more than one project for consideration each year. However, efforts will be made to evenly distribute the MNMG funds throughout the City of Reading based on the eligible applications received. Selection, generally, will be limited to a total of \$2,500 to any one neighborhood organization in one twelve month period. In addition, project funding is subject to the availability of funds through the City of Reading. Efforts will be made to distribute funds throughout the year. However, funds could become exhausted in any quarterly cycle depending upon the number of successful applicants and the amounts requested.

Also, projects that clearly show sustainability are more likely to be funded.

Project Review

All projects will be reviewed by a team composed of City of Reading Department Managers and the Executive Director of RBI/OND. Other members may be invited to participate in discussions and evaluation.

Grant Proposal Scoring

All proposals will be reviewed based on the criteria presented under "Eligible Projects", the general requirements of the grant writing process, and the affect the project will have on the neighborhood. Maximum points are 110. A minimum of 70 points is required to be considered for funding. The criteria and maximum points that will be awarded are as follows:

- Provide a benefit to the neighborhood – 10 points
- Scope of neighborhood residents' involvement in the project – 20 points
- Scope of business partner involvement in the project – 20 points
- Innovative approach – 10 points
- Likelihood of project outcomes achieved – 10 points
- Realistic and complete budget – 20 points
- Sustainability – 10 points
- Bonus points for submission as an electronic MS Word document – 5 points

Bonus points for first time proposal submission – 5 points

Grant Notification

The Office of Neighborhood Development will notify each grant applicant of the selection committee's decision, in writing, within ninety (90) days of submission. The project leader of the organizations whose proposals are selected will receive an MNMG Agreement from the City, which must be signed and returned to the Office of Neighborhood Development as soon as possible. Proposals that do not follow application and general guidelines for submission will be returned stating that guidelines were not followed. Proposals that follow all guidelines, but fail to meet the 70 point minimum will be returned for correction and/or adjustment. In both instances it will be up to the organization submitting the proposals to decide whether to make the necessary changes and resubmit the proposals.

Project Completion

All projects must be completed and funds spent within one calendar year of approval. All monies solicited (from partners) to support the MNMG project must be spent on the MNMG project. If any partner funds remain after one calendar year, the NO must include a timeline in the final report stating when and how these partner funds will be spent on grant project related activities. All remaining City grant funds will be returned to the City of Reading.

A "Completed Project" report will be required with sixty days of the completion of the project (not at the end of twelve months). The report will include the project outcomes, photographs and other documentation of the project (flyers, etc.), copies receipts, of cancelled checks, report on the use of all funds, and documentation reflecting the use of volunteer hours and in-kind contributions. This information may be used as a part of reporting to local newspapers, radio and television. Projects not completed and documented properly will prevent the neighborhood organization from obtaining future funding until all reporting has been completed.

Project Finances

The Office of Neighborhood Development will act as the "bank" for the distribution of funds to NOs (and their vendors) that have approved projects. NOs will create sub-accounts under Reading Beautification, Inc.'s account with its bank. All City of Reading funds will be deposited into these sub-accounts to be drawn upon when necessary to pay expenses.

Neighborhood organizations that are 501(c)(3) organizations, and are audited annually, will be allowed to receive funds from the City of Reading directly and to write checks on their own accounts. In order to satisfy this requirement a NO would include, as a part of the MNMG package, a copy of the NO's non-profit documentation from the IRS and a letter from a recognized certified public accounting firm acknowledging that the NO's books are reviewed, or audited, annually.

Inappropriate, or misappropriated, use of funds, or other resources, in the undertaking of this MNMG project by the neighborhood organization, or its leadership, will disqualify the organization from accessing the MNMG funds in the future and could result in severe penalties.